

## The ACT:

# Making Strides Where It Counts

**“The foundation of every state  
is the education of its youth.”**

**—Diogenes Laertius**

The grades are in. And Arkansas students – and the state itself – are celebrating a job well done.

The celebration centers on the latest ACT scores. Arkansas students recorded their best gains on the college entrance exam in four years and pulled off the best performance of any state that tested at least half its graduating students.

The score? The average composite was 20.6 – that’s up 0.3 points from last year. While still behind the national average of 21.1, Arkansas students posted a larger gain than the national average, which was up 0.2 points.

The exam tests students in English, math, reading, and science. A perfect score is 36.

While the number of students taking the test – about 21,000 – has remained stable over the past five years, this year’s performance improved across the board.

♦ The average reading score, 20.9, is up from 20.6 last year.

♦ The math score also jumped 0.3 points – from 19.6 to 19.9.

♦ The science score improved 0.2 points – to 20.3.

♦ The English score also was up 0.2 points – to 20.7, which is above the national average of 20.6.

So what does this mean? “The ACT is a vital predictor of workforce and college success,” John Davidson, deputy director for career and technical education, said. “The

higher score means Arkansas students are better prepared for college. And fewer of them will have to spend their time and money on remedial courses.”

According to the Department of Education, 52 percent of the students taking the test this year are ready for college-level math, and 64 percent are ready for college English courses. Those numbers are up from last year’s 50 percent for math and 63 percent for English.

“We still have some work to do,” DWE Director John C. Wyvill said. “But the advances our students have made over the past 10 years show the sweeping education reforms Gov. Huckabee has put in place have taken root.”

One of those reforms is the Smart Core curriculum, which has brought more rigor to high school subjects. Davidson said the higher ACT score is reflective of the Smart Core.

“In all of our programs of study, we encourage students to take the Smart Core,” he added.

The Department of Education doesn’t break out student scores for CTE completers (those students who complete a CTE program of study).

But there are some conclusions that can be drawn about CTE students from the information that is provided.

“The majority of CTE completers who took the ACT have taken the Smart Core,” Davidson said. “Those students are more likely to stay in college and less likely to need remediation than those completers who did not take the Smart Core.”

